

**THE NEBRASKA COMMISSION ON PROBLEM GAMBLING
GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR
AND THE LEGISLATURE
FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024**

Gamblers Assistance Program

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<https://problemgambling.nebraska.gov/>

INTRODUCTION

Section 9-1004(7) of Nebraska Revised Statutes requires the director of the Gamblers Assistance Program to file an annual report with the Governor and the Clerk of the Legislature. This report provides details of the administration of the Program and the distribution of funds from the Gamblers Assistance Fund.

The Legislature has given the Nebraska Commission on Problem Gambling responsibility for a range of activities. Program funds are to be used "primarily for counseling and treatment services for problem gamblers and their families who are residents of Nebraska." The Commission is to develop a process for evaluation and approval of contracts with treatment providers and other services vendors; develop standards for training and certification of counselors; review and use evaluation data; use funds for education regarding problem gambling and prevention of problem gambling; and create and implement outreach and education programs.

During the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2024, the Commission engaged in activities in these areas. This report summarizes the finances of the Program and describes the various activities with which the Commission has been engaged.

THE NEBRASKA COMMISSION ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

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I. GAMBLERS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FINANCES

The Gamblers Assistance Program receives funding from several state sources, none of which comes from state income, sales or property taxes, or any federal program. The Program's expenditures are paid out of two cash funds, the Gamblers Assistance Fund and the Health Care Cash Fund.

The primary account from which the Program's expenditures are paid is the Gamblers Assistance Fund. The sources of revenue for the Gamblers Assistance Fund are:

- Profits generated by the Nebraska Lottery, based on requirements in the Constitution.
- A statutory share of the advertising budget in the Lottery operations cash fund.
- An appropriation from the Charitable Gaming operations cash fund.
- A statutory share of the tax on casino revenue.

The Program also received an appropriation from the Health Care Cash Fund.

The following summaries are derived from the contents of monthly financial reports prepared by the accounting staff of the Department of Administrative Services.

(A) Gamblers Assistance Program Financial Performance 07/01/23-06/30/24

Total Program revenue (Gambler Assistance Fund + Health Care Cash Fund):	2,592,115
Total Program expenditures:	3,019,163
Net Program expenditures in excess of revenue:	(427,048)

(B) Gamblers Assistance Fund Performance During the Period 07/01/23-06/30/24

Revenue Transferred Into the Fund

Article III, Section 24 Constitutional formula: 500,000 + 1% of remaining Lottery profit:

Transfer September 2023	649,826
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Transfer December 2023	134,193
Transfer March 2023	135,256
Transfer June 2023	128,967
Total received from Lottery profits during the period:	1,048,242
Section 9-831 5% of Lottery advertising expenditures:	375,732
Section 9-1,101 Charitable Gaming Operations Fund:	400,000
Casino tax	494,170
Investment income:	<u>23,970</u>
Total revenue to Gamblers Assistance Fund during the period:	2,342,114

Expenditures Paid Out of the Fund

Salaries and benefits	180,802
Other operations	813,901
Government aid (counseling)	<u>1,774,460</u>
Total	2,769,163

Recapitulation

Gamblers Assistance Fund revenue:	2,342,114
Gamblers Assistance Fund expenditures:	<u>-2,769,163</u>
Net Gamblers Assistance Fund expenditures in excess of revenue:	(427,049)

Gamblers Assistance Fund Balance

Gamblers Assistance Fund balance 07/01/23:	1,008,489
Gamblers Assistance Fund balance 06/30/24:	581,440
Gamblers Assistance Fund balance change 07/01/22-06/30/23:	- 427,049

Health Care Cash Fund

Appropriations:	250,000
Expenditures: all for government aid (counseling services)	-250,000

Total Counseling Expenditures

From Health Care Cash Fund:	250,000
From Gamblers Assistance Fund:	<u>1,774,460</u>
Total Counseling Expenditures:	2,024,460

II. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD

JULY 1, 2023-JUNE 30, 2024

1. Commission Meetings

The Commission met four times to consider issues in the operations of the Program. These meetings included reviews of the financial status of the Program, consideration of new and renewed contracts with therapists and other vendors, development of initiatives, monitoring the budget for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2023 and looking forward to the fiscal year starting July 1, 2024. Meeting notices and minutes of the meetings were posted to the state events calendar and the website maintained by the Program. Therapists were invited to attend Commission meetings to exchange ideas and give input to staff and commissioners to aid in the development of Program activities.

2. Therapist Contracts

The Commission performs its obligation to provide treatment services to Nebraskans dealing with the effects of disordered gambling by entering into contracts with therapists. During this fiscal year, the Commission had 22 therapist contracts with agencies and individual therapists located in 12 communities. Payments to therapists are based on fee-for-services rendered.

The Commission made payments to these therapists totaling \$2.011 million during this fiscal year. Therapists are required to comply with a guideline manual that defines types of therapy and utilization standards. Services are provided to Nebraskans and members of their families experiencing adversity because of addiction to gambling. The Program's counselors provided approximately 9,000 hours of therapy services to Nebraskans during the fiscal year, by a combination of individual, family and group counseling.

Counselors offer two categories of service: extended outpatient therapy and short-term urgent care therapy. The Program experienced a 30% increase in the number of Nebraskans seeking assistance; calls to the Helpline increased by 40% over the previous year. Telehealth utilization expanded in the spring and is expected to continue as counselors and clients adapt.

The Program recognizes that addictions of all kinds are prone to relapse, and gambling addiction is no exception. The American Society of Addiction Medicine states that relapse is to be expected. Year-over-year, approximately 30% of the Program's clients state that they had previously been in counseling therapy for gambling problems and are returning for more help.

3. FYE 2024 Budget

The final appropriation for the first fiscal year of the biennium, ending June 30, 2024, was \$3,192,346. Of that, \$1.15 million was earmarked for therapy services and \$138,372 was allocated for staff salaries (2 FTE). Casino gaming tax revenue was \$494,170, far below the predictions made in 2021-22. The Commission adopted a conservative budget, recognizing that the delays in casino development meant that the revenue was unlikely to equal the amount that was predicted.

Program expenditures were \$3,019,163, an increase of 27% over the previous year. The increase was the result of increases in the number of Nebraskans seeking program help, and an increase in the amount allocated to public information and prevention messages.

4. Website

The Program continues to improve the official State of Nebraska website for visitors to use as the primary path to find help for problem gambling in Nebraska. It is located on the state home page at problemgambling.nebraska.gov. Visitors can find therapy locations near them, public information about the Program elements, current understanding of gambling disorders, and public and professional resources. The website also serves as a primary notification board for meetings and events for the Nebraska Commission on Problem Gambling.

The website also hosts landing pages for the multimedia prevention campaign that began in early 2018, nicknamed "BetCareful," which is designed to draw a gambler's attention to the

downside of gambling, and “LifeAfterBet”, which informs the public that help for gambling problems is free for Nebraskans and their families.

The messages campaign included ads on banners at the University of Nebraska football stadium and basketball arena and messages on broadcasts of UNL games and Big Ten games.

The Commission believes that the harm caused by uncontrolled gambling is a public health concern. Addiction to gambling is not simply an individual’s personal problem. It affects families, neighborhoods and communities. The Commission’s multimedia campaigns attracted over 9,000 new users to our website each month during the year, which validates the decision to use this medium to disseminate our message.

5. Online Training

The Commission continued its contract with the Nebraska Council on Compulsive Gambling for presentation of training classes for counselors who deliver therapy services to Nebraskans with gambling problems. This is an online course presented by Bellevue University. It runs for 19 weeks and is repeated approximately three times per year. The Commission provided underwriting to develop the program and supports Nebraska candidates for certification by subsidizing part of their tuition cost. Enrollments are limited to 10 students for each session.

The Commission also arranged with Bellevue University to offer a shortened course that is available to mental and behavioral health professionals already practicing under other licenses. A shorter academic requirement and lower tuition cost will help to attract new counselors in locations that are now unserved.

As a result of increased awareness and the convenience of training, the Commission issued counselor certificates to nine new counselors. Expanding service by training more new counselors is a continuous process.

6. Data

In response to guidance from the Legislature and the Executive Branch, program staff developed a series of data gathering instruments. These forms are designed to enable the Commission to develop outcome measures. The forms also provide information about the population the program serves, including current status and history. The history questions are based on a meta-analysis of studies of risk and protective factors that influence the development of addiction to gambling. Over time, the Commission will have data to use as a basis for prevention programming and improved counseling utilization standards.

The complete annual report of data is attached to this report. This data was reported by Nebraskans diagnosed with gambling disorder and is not based on surveys, adding to its reliability.

7. Problem Gambling Prevention, Education and Awareness Messages

By statute, five percent of the advertising budget of the Nebraska Lottery is to be dedicated to presentation of messages and information to the public about problem gambling. The Commission has entered into an agreement with the Lottery Division of the Department of Revenue that calls for preparation of an annual advertising plan. The plan accounts for previous year expenditures and projects coming year activities. For the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2024, this allocation was \$375,732.

This year the Commission's expenditures on these activities totaled \$666,717, largely due to the University of Nebraska Athletic Department partnership. Expenditures included the contract with Agent Brand of Lincoln for the multimedia digital prevention campaign, and website content changes.

8. National Problem Gambling Awareness Month

In March Governor Pillen issued a proclamation declaring that March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month in Nebraska. The Legislature also adopted a resolution, and mayors and city councils from around the state issued similar proclamations.

III. PROGRAM DATA

Gambler Assistance Program counselors admit clients into therapy if they satisfy the diagnostic criteria for Disordered Gambler specified in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5th ed.* When a new client is admitted for therapy, information is gathered to help with diagnosis, treatment planning and program records. This information is analyzed under strict procedures that protect confidentiality. The resulting data gives the Commission insight into the characteristics of Nebraskans who seek help for gambling problems and the nature of gambling in Nebraska. The complete report is posted on the program's official state website.

Highlights from the data report include:

- 26% of Nebraskans seeking counseling for addiction to gambling considered suicide; another 4.5% attempted suicide before seeking counseling from our program. These rates of suicide thinking and attempts are significantly higher than in the general population.
- Average age of gamblers at the time of admission was 39; 70% of them thought about their need for professional help for 5 years or longer before finally seeking it.
- At the time of admission into therapy, 50% of male gamblers played on casino slot machines or convenience store slot machines; 72% of female gamblers played on these computer-operated devices.
- 149 new clients reported debt from gambling totaling over \$4 million; for these individuals, gambling debt was 31% of all household debt.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Nebraska Commission on Problem Gambling is carrying out its mission by expanding and improving existing programs for training therapists, expanding geographical coverage of therapy services and adding new therapists to the field. Subsidizing the cost of problem gambling therapy for Nebraskans and their families is the primary goal of the Program. The Commission is also committed to prevention, education and outreach activities. These activities emphasize evidence-based programs that have been proven to produce expected results.

For the Commission

David Geier, Director

Nebraska Gamblers Assistance Program